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ABSTRACT

This study describes a program for students in the target 4th, 7th, and 8th grades who exhibit low achievement in writing. This low achievement affects behaviors, attitudes, and peer interactions. Discipline referrals, district assessments, and teacher written assessments substantiate this dilemma. Probable cause for lack of writing skills has been attributed to lack of feedback from teacher to pupil and students' attitudes toward writing. Other probable causes are the unpredictable lifestyles of some students who are from low social economical status and poor health and readiness influences. The solution strategy involves cooperative learning, journalizing, and creative writing. The cooperative learning strategy will utilize group writing and peer review. The journalizing strategy will serve two purposes. First, the journal is an indicator of writing skills improvement. Second, the journal serves as a vehicle to improve written skills. The final components are the creative writing activities, which are used to increase interest and motivate students to write. Results are measured by data compiled from the writing rubric, expert interviews, and writing checklists. After compiling the results of the post-rubric both sites showed an improvement in writing skills. (Contains 10 unnumbered tables of data, 2 figures and 39 references. Appendixes contain survey instruments, rubrics, student artifacts, journal writing checklists, and student journal artifacts. (RS)

ED 455 525

# IMPROVING STUDENT'S WRITING ABILITY THROUGH JOURNALS AND CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISES

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# ABSTRACT

This study describes a program for students in the target 4th, 7th and 8th grades that exhibit low achievement in writing. This low achievement affects behaviors, attitudes, and peer interactions. Discipline referrals, district assessments, and teacher written assessments substantiate this dilemma.

Probable cause for lack of writing skills has been attributed to lack of feedback from teacher to pupil and students' attitudes toward writing. Another probable cause is the unpredictable lifestyles of some students who are from low social economical status, and poor health and readiness influences.

The solution strategy involves cooperative learning, journalizing, and creative writing. The cooperative learning strategy will utilize group writing and peer review. The journalizing strategy will serve two purposes. First, it is an indicator of writing skills improvement. Second, the journal services as a vehicle to improve written skills. The final component is the creative writing activities, which are used to increase interest and motivate students to write.

Results are measured by data compiled from the writing rubric, expert interviews, and writing checklist. The final component is the creative writing activities, which are used to increase interest and motivate students to write.

Results are measured by data compiled from the writing rubric, expert interviews and writing checklists.

After compiling the results of the post-rubric both sites showed an improvement in writing skills.

# CHAPTER ONE

## PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

### General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted elementary and middle school classes exhibited low achievement in writing. That affected behaviors, attitudes, and peer interactions. Evidence for the existence of the problem included district assessments, and teacher assessments.

### Immediate Problem Context

School District A

School District One is located in the far northwestern region of a mid-western state. It is a large urban area (population 173,645) and approximately 90 miles northwest of a major metropolitan area. The district covers over 170 square miles. It serves 27,000 students. The school board is elected from seven city districts. Student assignment has been titled Controlled Choice. Students who are new to the district or entering Kindergarten can select the school of their choice. There are 40 elementary schools, four middle schools with one under construction, and four high schools. The district also offers Magnet schools (including a science academy and fine arts program, among others) and an alternative high school. (Illinois School Report Card: 1999)

The racial/ethnic background of the teachers in the district as compared to the state was as follows: 89.3%/84.9% White, 5.6%/11.0% Black, and 3.7%/3.3% Hispanic, respectively. The district's average teaching experience was 18.6 years. Among the teaching staff, 26.2% have only a Bachelor's Degree, while 73.4% had a Master's degree. (Illinois School Report Card: 1999)

In 1999, the racial/ ethnic background of the students was 45.3% White, 48% Black, 6.3% Hispanic, and 0.4% Native American. The district had 46% of the students classified as low-income. Low-income students were defined by the state as students who came from families that receive aid, are institutionalized, under foster care, or receive free or reduced lunch Illinois School Report Card: 1999).

At that time, School District A was under a Federal Court order to desegregate. This was a result of a grass root movement started in 1989, which was known as People Who Care (PWC). PWC first started when a number of people protested the closing of west-side schools. The closing of these schools was accompanied with allegations of a long-term system wide pattern of racial discrimination and segregation of African-American and Hispanic students. The PWC filed a lawsuit and in 1993 a trial was held in the U.S Federal District Court. The District was found guilty on 11 counts of willful discrimination. The counts of discrimination included student tracking and grouping by ability, segregation within schools, student assignment to schools, faculty and equipment disparity, employment disparity, staff assignment, transportation, extracurricular activities, bilingual education, and the composition of the school board. The judge ordered that the school district implement remedy that would rectify the years of discrimination against Black and Hispanic students and provide an equal education for all children.

School Site A

School Site A was an elementary school on the West Side of the city. As determined by the state standards, it was a small elementary school, containing less than 283 students. It was a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade building. It was one of the Magnet schools featured in the district. The attraction of this school lay in the fact that it was a Year-round school (YRS), also known as Year-round education (YRE). School Site A was currently using the Success For All reading program (SFA). It also devoted an additional hour of reading instruction for a total of 245 minutes.

There were 254 students enrolled at Site A. The school had a population of 85.4% "Low-income" students. Class size at School Site A is considerably less than the majority of schools in District A. For example, the average first grade class in the district had 22.7 students, while Site A only had 14.0 students. Attendance for the school was at 91.2%, as compared to 96.3% for the state. In regards to parental involvement, the contact with parents equaled 96.4%.

Class at Site A started at 8:50 a.m. and ended at 3:00 p.m. Students had fifteen minutes for lunch followed by a fifteen-minute recess. There was one principal overseeing the school, with no assistant.

School District B

School District Two, like One, is also located in the far northwestern region of a mid-western state. It is outside of a large urban area, approximately 85 miles northwest of a major metropolitan area. School District Two served approximately 7,056 students. It was considered a medium size district by state standards. The district consisted of one early childhood center, five elementary schools, one middle school with two campuses,

and one high school. The school district's tax rate per $100.00 was $5.50 assessed property value. Using community taxes, state and federal funding the district's instructional expenditure per student was $3,625. The racial/ethnic background of the teachers in the district was 99.3% White, 0.0% Black, 0.2% Hispanic, and 0.5% Asian. Of the teachers in the district, 74.7% are female, while 25.3% are male. The average teaching experience in the district was 16.9 years, slightly higher than the state average of 15.0 years. There were 435 teachers in the district. (Illinois School Report Card: 1999)

The racial/ethnic background of the students in the district was 92.2% White, 2.3% Black, 4.2% Hispanic, 0.3% Native American and 1.0% Asian. In the district, 16.4% of the students are considered to be low-income. Students that have limited proficiency of he English language comprise 0.6% of the student population in the district.

School Site B

School Site B is a middle school located in a commercial/industrial and residential area. It served approximately 1,200 students. The block on which the school is located has a four-lane street in front of the building where most of the buses drop off and pick up students. The other three sides of the School's property are residential streets lined with small well-kept homes. On the West side of the building there are four temporary trailers that are being used as classrooms, teacher resource work areas, and a staff parking lot. To the East are the athletic fields, a parking lot, tennis courts, and the property and building of one of the district's elementary schools. At the back of the building, the South side, there is another parking lot, which is used by busses for student drop off and pick up. There is one church in the neighborhood. To the North, along the four-lane street, is a strip of small businesses across the street from the school. Signs are posted as a Zero

Tolerance Drug Free Zone, restricting drug use or sales within 1000 feet of the school property.

Attendance at School Site B was 91.6%, slightly below the state average of 93.6%. Thirteen percent of the students enrolled in or left the school during the school year. One and two tenth percent of the students were classified as chronically truant. Parental support seemed to fade as students got older. Seventy-six percent of the students' parents or guardians had personal contact with the school staff during the school year. For comparison, the percentages of personal contacts between parents and school staff at the elementary schools were 92.7% for the district and 96.1% for the state. "Personal contacts" included parent-teacher conferences, personal visits to the school by the parents, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. (Illinois School Report Card: 1999)

The school day began with the first bell that rang at 7:25 a.m. letting students into the building. Classes began at 7:35 and were 40 minutes in length. There were eight periods in the day with a 30-minute period for lunch. The busses arrived at 2:15 and school let out at 2:20 p.m. The students had roughly six minutes to board the busses. The building was to be clear of students by 2:30 unless they had after school commitments such as help sessions, clubs or organizations, athletics, or after school detentions. The school year ran 185 days from September to June.

**TABLE 1.A RACIAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS**

| | White | Black | Hispanic | Native American | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District One | 45.3% | 48.0% | 6.3% | 0.4% | 0.0% |
| District Two | 92.2% | 2.3% | 4.2% | 0.3% | 1.0% |

**TABLE 1.B RACIAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF TEACHERS**

| | White | Black | Hispanic | Native American | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District One | 89.3% | 5.6% | 3.7% | 0.0% | 1.4% |
| District Two. | 99.3% | 0.0% | 0.2% | 0.0% | 0.5% |

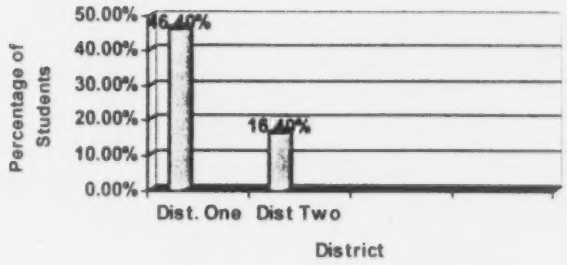


**FIGURE 1.C PERCENTAGE OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS**

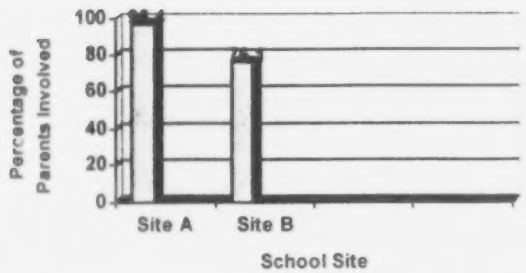


**FIGURE 1.D PERCENTAGE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

Surrounding Community

School Site A is in a city that has three area hospitals. The city also provides the opportunity for higher education, including a community college, a large public university, a small business college, a private college, a school of nursing and a university college of medicine. The city has over 7,000 acres of parks, jogging and bike paths. According to the 1990 Census Report the population was 173,645. The population was identified by race as follows: White 145,707, Black 22,083, American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut 460, Asian or Pacific Islander 2,329 and Other 3,066. The unemployment rate in 1999 was at 5.9%.

School Site B, a smaller city, is adjacent to the city in which School Site A was located. Several cities feed into the district that includes School Site B. The total population of the district was 36,415 people in 1999. The population was divided in the following way: White 34,851, Black 422, Hispanic 704, Asian/Pacific Islander 264, Other 174. The median household income was $31,147 with the median home value being $54,696.

## National Context of the Problem

The limited writing opportunities students have to demonstrate understanding in school has recently been recognized as a significant problem associated with education. "Changes in beliefs about what students should learn and how they can best be taught are influencing the way many students are assessed"(Ryan and Miyasaka, 1995). There are several factors that contribute to the national problem of the lack of writing opportunities in the classroom. Factors include isolation of grammar and writing skills, lack of opportunities for non-structured writing, and emotional issues affecting the child.

Teaching students isolated skills, such as phonics, can be a detriment to depth of understanding and thoroughness of sharing ideas in writing. Although some skills need to be taught in isolation, "...instruction which strongly emphasizes structured drill and practice on discrete, factual knowledge does students a major disservice" (NCREL, 1991). Students need meaningful ways to organize and information and make it more meaningful. Teaching writing skills in isolation does not promote a meaningful situation for students, as well as hindering interest in the writing process when a student is more concerned with parts of speech and grammar, as opposed to expressing their thoughts. "Constructivists suggest that learning is not linear. It does not occur on a timeline of basic skills" (Burke 1994). Burke (1994) further stated, "In order for meaningful learning to take place, people have to interpret information and relate it to their own prior knowledge." Students are given greater opportunities to demonstrate depth of understanding not through recall of basic facts, but through application of knowledge. In summary, writing needs to be a cross-curricular vehicle for students to develop and apply information and opinions in a positive form.

# CHAPTER TWO

# PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

## Problem Evidence

In order to document evidence of low achievement in writing, student surveys/interviews, school report cards, and interviews with language specialists and other staff were analyzed within the first month of the 2000-2001 school year. Observation checklists of students' performances on writing tasks were also maintained and documented by teachers.

The targeted groups involved included 9 students from School Site A and 34 students from School Site B, for a total of 40 students. Although the survey was distributed to many students, the study was only being done with students in which parental permission was given.

Students were asked to complete a survey pertaining to daily behavioral habits (Appendix A and B). At site A, 9 students were surveyed and 9 were returned. At site B, 45 students were surveyed and 31 were returned. The first questions on the General Student Survey pertained to students' diet habits.

There has been a great deal of research done that documents the fact that students who aren't getting their nutritional needs met perform at a lower level at school. Skipping breakfast has been pointed out as possible causes for behavioral problems, low test scores,

physical complications, and other off-task behaviors. With these questions we wanted to see if there were any trends or patterns in the subjects diet that could be hindering their work in the classroom.

| Site | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| Diet survey questions | 60% | 59% |

The second pertained to rest and sleeping patterns. Students often seem to be run down and over tired which makes concentrating on class work more difficult. This block of questions asked the students about their sleeping habits.

| Site | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| Sleeping patterns | 74% | 58% |

The third pertained to school environment. Students are the most open to learning when they are in a safe, empathetic, stimulating environment. We wanted to know how the student felt about where they did their learning.

| Site | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| School Environment | 88% | 69% |

The fourth question was asked in the area of exercise. The question posed was, "Do you exercise at least three times per week?". This question proved to be unnecessary, as all of the students in the study have either daily Physical Education classes or another form of physical activity several times per week in school. We felt it was important to ask the question anyway because we introduced the survey as a general

health questionnaire, and it seemed appropriate to make a well-rounded measurement tool.

| Site | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| Exercise | 88% | 69% |

The fifth set of questions pertained to goal setting. Most of these questions pertained to personal feelings and self evaluation. For an individual to want to improve they must know where and who they are currently. We asked the subjects to evaluate how they looked at themselves and what they did for self-enrichment.

| Site | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| Goal Setting | 22% | 60% |

The final block of questions pertained to leisure activities. Students were surveyed on how they spent time outside of the classroom. We wanted to know if any of those activities related to reading or writing enjoyment. This was one of the studies underlying themes: can we help our students learn to express themselves freely and appreciate writing as a way to relax and open their mind.

| Site | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| Students who read the paper | 11% | 20% |
| watch two or more hours of television | 88% | 75% |
| Spends at least one hour on favorite hobby | 55% | 75% |
| Spends forty-five minutes or more reading daily | 0% | 25% |

Additional instruments used to measure student attitudes towards writing. One of which was a Pre-Test Rubric. This evaluation tool was used as a free writing activity that was assessed by a rubric. The purpose was for base information that could later be used at the completion of the study was completed and evaluate if there was an improvement in the student writing abilities (appendix C and D).

Journaling was also used regularly. Journaling was used in class as a tool to promote free writing and directed response writing. Most weeks it was done twice a week on various days, loosely structured as far as which days so that teachers had flexibility in the inclusion of the journaling. Much of our action research project had to be scheduled according to available time in the classroom. Although writing is essential and cross-curricular, other content areas could not be sacrificed. We still had our curriculum goals to meet, and writing was not an area of specialty for anyone in the group.

As the students participated in their journal writing they were also being evaluated with a checklist. The purpose of the checklist was not to evaluate the content of their writing, but rather their involvement in the writing process and on task behavior. We

believed that if a student was on task, concentrating on what he/she was doing, and not looking around or being a distraction to others the quality of work would be high (Appendix E and F). As the teacher reviewed the journals, comments and questions were often added. These additions were directed back to the student to inspire them to write a follow-up response. This helped establish an open dialog between student and teacher as well as giving the student an opportunity to express themselves on a deeper level, when moved to do so.

Another component of the research was creative writing activities and cooperative group writing. A majority of our plan was to involve the students in a wide variety of writing activities that would serve two purposes. First, it would allow for writing practice and then to enhance writing enjoyment. These creative writing activities, in addition to cooperative group writing, encouraged students to work together to create one of a kind stories and reflect their personalities and emotions. When you can get a student to emotionally invest in something, they are primed and ready to learn.

The final element was a Post-writing rubric. This was done at the completion of the study. We used a free writing activity and encouraged students to express their complete thoughts on the topic. We then used our rubric to evaluate the students' work. These results and recommendations will be discussed further in Chapter Four (appendix G)

## Probable Causes

The literature that was reviewed revealed several underlying causes for poor student writing performance. The focus of this literature review concentrated on the following four areas, which we believed played a role in students poor writing

performance. The first area of concern was writing assessments. The second was related to the student's lifestyle choices; poor health patterns and the negative affects such behavior has on student's ability to perform at their optimal level. The third area of concern focused on the emotional state of students in the school environment in general. The fourth area focused on the classroom environment, and how it may lead to poor writing performance.

According to Stiggins, we as a society are relying to heavily upon standardized test and assessment as indicators to the student who can write and to those who cannot. He continued to say, not only are many tests flawed but also the whole assessment process is but a snapshot of how a student is performing. This snapshot only provides a statistician numbers on how a student has did on one given day. (1999). Neill's article Transforming Student Assessment echoed Stiggins in that standardized test do not provide a accurate view of how well students can write. The author went on to elaborate on the fact that standardized tests are poor tools to use for writing in the first place. The author continued by stating that a writing assessment cannot be reduced to multiple-choice answers as they are in math and science. Continuing along this line of thought is that writing prompts may be flawed because it may require a lot of background knowledge the students may not possess at this point in their lives. Stiggins also mentioned that time constraints do not lend itself to good writing since effective writing takes time to revise (1997).

Another facet of the standardized tests and how they are not an effective assessment tool is that teachers do not feel accountable for the results. According to Gallagher in the article, Seat at The Table Teachers Reclaiming Assessment Through Rethinking Accountability, educators have no investment in creating the assessments they

are asked to use, therefore they feel less accountable to the end results. To further expand upon this the educators do not feel the need to be held accountable by the communities business sector or the growing standardized test industry (March 2000). The article continued to state that educators should be invited and encouraged to participate in the assessment process. in order to increase accountability. If teachers were allowed to emotional invest in establishing assessment standards the accountability factor would be shared by everyone involved. The notion of emotional investment was stated clearly by Gene I. Maeroff when he stated in his article Altered Destinies, Making Life Better for Schoolchildren in Need, emotional investment in school is needed for students to feel a connection to school, "feel a part of it". "We have to invite kids to choose us as their school," said Boyd. "They won't give up their old habits until we prove worthy of their trust." Cynics might deride such a philosophy, insisting that school should be solely about book learning. What they overlook, though, is that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may have no other place to deal with their feelings - no other bulwarks of support - and that without the embracing atmosphere of the school, they might not be able to open themselves to learning. This statement symbolized our contention that students have not been given that opportunity to express themselves freely in a nurturing environment. In the same area, teachers have been restricted as to the methods they have been able to use in assessing and developing their students writing skills because of restraints, and emphasis placed on the curriculum.

Assessments and their validity may have an even greater effect on student performance than it does teachers. Richard J. Stiggins explored in the November 1999 article titled Assessment, Student confidence, and School Success, the ways in which

assessment can affect the motivation and self-esteem of pupils and the benefits of engaging pupils in self-assessment suggest that both deserves careful attention. More over, Black and Williams cite research studies that have shown that "if pupils are given only marks or grades, they do not benefit from feedback on their work".

Their worst-case scenario involves pupils who get low marks this time, got low marks last time, and expect to get low marks next time. This becomes "a shared belief between them and their teacher, a self-fulfilling prophecy, that they are not clever enough to succeed". In fact students may resist sharing their writing because of an apprehension they have concerning the grading of grammar, sentence structure, and spelling. Those apprehensions will often outweighing the content of their writing hindering free expression. Students should not be evaluated based solely on their technical writing skills, but on their willingness to freely express themselves in a nurturing and safe environment (Black and Williams, 1999).

Davis and Williams discuss several interesting points in their article Accountability Issues, Possibilities, and Guiding Questions For District wide Assessment of Student Learning (1997). "At the school and classroom levels, assessment and evaluation practices have focused on gathering information that will help with decisions about ways to improve individual student performance and school instructional programs". "Schools are increasingly undertaking program evaluation activities such as audits, surveys, and accreditation processes the yield reports to parents and the community and provide information for improvement planning".

This is a progressive approach to assessment. It also helps reduce the teacher's role, by encouraging the use of the assessment practices the classroom teacher has refined

to evaluate each students' success' and need's. Schools and classroom teachers are able to provide "on the spot" evidence of student learning through portfolios, work folders of various types, and observation records. These tools are a far cry from the large-scale state and national testing procedures that seem to be the growing focus of accountability. Davis and Williams recognize that large-scale assessments have been a reality for a long time. Most of that time, the purpose of schooling was to sort and classify students. Now our purposes are to support student learning and to enable every student to fulfill his or her potential. If large-scale testing continues to be emphasized Davis and Williams thinks these guiding questions need to be answered:

- How can clarity of purpose be maintained?
- How can we ensure that we are measuring the right thing in the right way?
- How can we address the perceived conflicts between standard tests and a learner-centered approach to teaching and assessment?
- How can trust be developed with students, teachers, parents, and community members?
- How can the district invite ownership on the part of teachers and administrators and the involvement of parents and community members?
- What kind of checks and balances need to be in place to ensure that the assessment is multifaceted and reflective of district and provincial initiatives?
- How can we inundate practitioners with success stories that include data so as to support best practices?

What method of administration will cause the fewest negative effects in student performance, reducing test anxiety? In closing Davis and Williams say, "It is important to

remember the purpose for large-scale assessments and to know that it is a different purpose from that of the classroom teacher. pg.77 ".

Physiological factors may also play a part in student's poor writing performance. The Consequences of Insufficient Sleep for Adolescents is an article written by Ronald E. Dahl, M.D., in which he focuses on "the convergence of evidence suggesting that changes in mood and motivation are among the most important effects of sleep loss. pg. 355" Consumer Reports, November 2000, lists several other side effects of sleep debt including, but not exclusive to, headaches, poor concentration, low energy, anti social behavior, and poor nutritional choices, that may also lead to changes in mood and low blood sugar levels. Dahl states, "Sufficient sleep is defined as the amount necessary to permit optimal daytime functioning." Sleep standards advise 9 to 10 hours of sleep nightly for students age 7 to 10. From the age of 11 through their teen years students should get 8 to 9 hours of sleep per night. Other physiological factors such as poor nutritional choices, inability to manage stress in a positive way, lack of regular exercise, and not drinking at least eight 8 oz. glasses of water, or water based drinks, per day may also cause similar problems with mood and concentration (Consumer Reports 2000). Our study will be using student, parent, and staff survey's to explore the level of influence these various factors may play in student writing performance.

Related to the area of sleep debt and other physical demands placed on the body is the issue of the starting time of school. Kubow, Wahlstrom, and Bemis explored the area of Starting Time and School Life; the authors discuss the findings from a survey of teachers and from focus group meetings attended by a variety of stakeholders. Nearly all the students in the focus groups noted that they were feeling more rested and alert for the

first hour of the day with a later starting time. By going to bed at the same time each night they were getting on the average one more hour of sleep each school night. Teachers reported that the later starting time enabled the students to con to school more rested and therefore more ready for learning. The middle schools experimented with a start time of 9:40 a.m. Not all of the problems would be solved with a later starting time however. Kubow, Wahlstrom, and Bemis found that even though the students were better prepared for morning activities many of the teachers in the study felt it was more difficult to motivate at the end of the day as a result of student and teacher fatigue. Any loss of motivation due to scheduling is counterproductive to idea of students producing at their optimum level whether writing or in another area of study. Know one, student or teacher, wants to feel like they working harder and accomplishing less each day. Similar problems came out of the study done by Kubow, Wahlstrom, and Bemis in the elementary school. Students who started later than normal often came to school having already watched two or three hours of TV before school, since most young children go to bed early tend to wake up early as well. This also led to student fatigue and disengagement in the afternoon. One teacher described such television-watching children as having "eyes glazed over." Clearly, to the staff there were no apparent benefits for the elementary aged child. Earlier start times for elementary children did confirm some teacher perspectives that students were more alert and ready to learn. Earlier start increased morning instruction time, which was viewed as advantageous to elementary-aged students, especially children with emotional and behavioral disorders. This study strengthens our opinion that start time could be an important factor in student performance depending on when that student was scheduled for a particular class. That is an issue that is out of the

teachers control, however the teacher may some room to play with the timing of certain assignments within the frame work of the classroom or even when a specific assignment is assigned as homework. While encouraging the student to give their best effort the idea of timely homework invites further investigation and research.

Other factors that may influence the ability of students to do their best in school is their home life, they're living conditions, and the physical condition or safety of their home environment. Gene I. Maeroff addressed this issue in the article Altered Destinies Making Life Better for School Children in Need. The article suggested that the sense of well being that America's advantaged children take for granted, is missing from the lives of many less-advantaged youngsters. For those who live in the heart of a big city, for instance, day-to-day existence is a crapshoot in which they can come up losers with no notice. Little about their lives is predictable to save the unsettled nature of their existence. The availability of health care is sometimes no better than in the countries of the developing world. Yet these young people are supposed to involve themselves in serious learning and over come the adversities that undermine formal schooling. It is difficult to imagine how any student would be able to give their best effort when they come to school, hungry, possibly fearful for their own or their families safety; then by asked to deal with the pressures of succeeding in class. What chance is there that the quality of their work wouldn't be affected, or that their willingness to participate would be diminished under these circumstances?

A challenging home life makes it even more crucial for the school environment to be supportive and safe for all of the students. Kauffman and Burbach did research On Creating a Climate Of Classroom Civility, but first recognized that many administrators'

first response to a violent or threatening school situation is install metal detectors, implement a zero tolerance policy, and increase the number of security guards in the school. Some of these measures may help create a safer school environment, but the sense of "high security" doesn't necessarily create a nurturing environment that is conducive to learning and creativity. Barone wrote in his article *Bullying in School* that roughly 16% of the students have been victims of bullies. Another 58% of students reported bullies while in middle school had bothered them. If bullying is left unchecked in our schools, as stated by Kauffman and Burbach, it can lead to tragic consequences. Bullying can leave lasting emotional and psychological scars on children.

Even now the memories of being victimized by a bully when in school are quite clear to most adults. Furthermore, research has shown that bullying can extend across the generations: the children of bullies often become bullies themselves. A question the researchers for this article review had was why does so little get done to stop bullying? Kauffman and Burbach said this, many adults consider bullying to be a normal part of growing up, a rite of passage so to speak, to learn how to deal with the situation of being bullied. A second reason why bullying continues unabated might be that educators have become desensitized to bullying and do not even see it. The way most people treat each other now a days is much harsher and abusive than in the passed. Many of the behaviors that would have gotten immediate consequences, including swearing in the halls between classes, is so common place that it is often overlooked or not even noticed at all. A third issue is that the schools are overwhelmed by other problems outside of education with which they must deal. And finally, schools at times may not want to identify bullying as a problem because they do not have the resources to address it. All of the factors presented

in this chapter have dealt with problems some students must deal with on a daily basis. either at home or at school. These circumstances can have a negative effect on student's academic performance and emotional growth while in school. Our study is focusing on developing writing skills, but all areas of learning will be affected negatively without consideration being given to change all for the aforementioned areas.

# CHAPTER THREE

# THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

## Literature Review

Research suggests several different options for improving low achievement in writing. Some approaches that were cited in the literature were improving teaching skills, incorporating and introducing technology to staff and students, re-evaluating the roles of teachers in the instruction of writing, and using authentic assessment to name a few.

A number of researchers focused on the need for teachers to improve their skills in order to teach more effectively. According to Wolfe et, al, (1997) in "Taking Charge of School Reform: English Teachers as Leaders " (p.470), classroom based research, "has pointed out that teachers need to re-define their roles to include responsibilities for conducting their own research with the students they teach."(p.475) This is important as it provides an opportunity to obtain a more tailor made learning environment that includes strategies that work for their given classroom or students abilities.

There are many ways to improve writing education in our classrooms that reach far beyond classroom research. Beverly Clark (1985) explained that since writing is finally being viewed as a process rather than a product and since each individual's process is different, "writing teachers have increasingly turned to a one on one instruction." This method has become known as a writing conference (Bissex, 1981; Caulkins, 1986).

Meyer and Smith (1987) believed that the purpose of a writing conference was, "to help writers gain the confidence and skill necessary for them to write well independently." For students to reach that objective it is essential that instructors implement a duality to their approach, which incorporates form and confidence. They must see themselves as text-oriented instructors who build skill and student oriented nurturers that build confidence (Wilcox ,1997). Wilcox stressed being a nurturer as most important to the students as represented by the saying, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." (p.509)

To become a better nurturer, it is important to respect all students. Teachers can show respect in many subtle ways, "if a teacher's chair is higher than a child's, the teacher will tower over the child and convey and attitude of superiority. Teachers' body language in literally looking down on a child may produce more harm than the discomfort of arranging adult size legs a round child sized chair" (Wilcox, 1997). Being sensitive to a child's thoughts and potential feelings is of great importance when teaching effective writing skills.

To further define the teacher's role as nurturer/teacher, one must not devalue a child's work and should not attempt to take control of it. It is important that the teacher acknowledge the student's strengths to develop trust and allow the teacher to be more approachable. It is imperative to establish that the student is the author and he/she will own the written work. The teachers should only be there to facilitate the writing process with respect to the student's original idea. This nurturing is a key component of minimizing writing apprehension.

Writing apprehension occurs when a student is reluctant or lacks confidence in his/

her writing abilities or products. L. Reeves suggested that students develop writing apprehension over a period of time and has identified some causes that aided in the development of this problem. The apprehensive writer has spent a relatively short amount of time working on the process of writing; and the writing produced was judged as being below average. In order to minimize this apprehension, a teacher would want to write everyday in class, create a non-judgmental atmosphere, and reduce the emphasis on grades and form from the start (1997).

Reeves suggested that the students be engaged in the process of writing a minimum of five to seven minutes a day in various form such as letters, journals, lists and poems. Freedman, from the Center for the Study of Writing at the University of California at Berkeley listed time and class size as being the largest factors which keep teachers from doing the amount of writing that is needed in order to improve writing skills. It was reported that 40 - 50 minutes twice a week is not enough time on task for quality writing to take place (Hill, 1992).

While the goal is to eventually have the students write with a minimum of errors, it is important to identify reoccurring mistakes that would greatly help the student's work if corrected. This identification process will eventually lead to the student having the locus of control in the writing process, which adds to their self-esteem and minimizes writing apprehension (1997).

Other suggestions, such as teacher-initiated remedies for improving writing are numerous and discussed in the literature. Karnes et al suggested that educators should pursue writing competition. The competitions would offer focus and purpose for writers, as well as build school and community pride. The authors compared the euphoria of

writting competitions to the same euphoria that sports competitions bring to the community and schools (1997).

Keeping the journal was also mentioned in several articles as a key component to improving writing. Teachers can use journals to uncover students' interests in a non-judgmental manner (Bromley, 1999). Ideally, journals are not graded or marked up by the teacher which lays the foundation for the writing process to occur in a safe environment. By writing journals in this manner, the writing guides students in finding their voice as a writer (Simmons, 1996). One type of writing that is produced successfully by journalizing is persuasive writing. Persuasive writing is developed because of the nature of interaction of peer and teacher review. The students gravitate toward supporting their opinion and their spelling and grammar will improve because the writers want their messages to be taken seriously by their peers (Bromley, 1999).

On the more creative side of improving writing the literature discussed very different approaches. The first was a combat style of writing known as "Demand Writing." This method gave teachers and students more of an authentic assessment of the writer's skills as compared to the multiple-choice answers found in many language tests (Downing, 1995). The author found demand writing pushed students to organize their thoughts which gave a purpose to reluctant writers and gave pace to impulsive writers (1995).

Another creative method involved kinesthetic intelligence and manipulation in order to aid students in the organization of their thoughts, which is needed in the writing process. One article suggested the use of tinker toys to represent the writing process. Hecker found that through the manipulation of tinker toys students would project their

ideas onto the pieces; thus organizing their thoughts. Hecker also wrote about how students can do a walking essay run-through before they actually write. The article went on to say the stories being told to the teacher verbally and maybe recorded, while the students use body movements that give meaning to the story. For example, when the student is walking forward the story is progressing. A student stoping and moving sideways or using hand gestures could be a signal for elaboration or support. This movement and talking through the paper has great benefits as it gives the student's something to attach their thoughts to. The article cited that when students forgot what to write, those who used this method could recall their movement which provided them with clues as to what they wanted to write. Although Hecker cautioned that this method did not work with all students, it was highly successful for some (1997).

Finally, another successful wring strategy that can be launched by the teacher is the use of the storyboard. Harrington suggested that students could form pictures in their minds prior to writing, then draw their pictures and lay them out in the order in which they will occur. Following these steps the teacher will guide them through the introduction, body, and the conclusion of their story with the use of pictures that the students have drawn (1994).

A number of researchers suggested writing across the curriculum in order to improve writing. Proponents feel that writing should not be isolated to an English class, rather, it should be infused into all areas of study. This process is commonly known as writing across the curriculum but can be referred to as "content area writing" or "writing to learn" (Brown, 1995). Advocates of the above noted find that writing is the vehicle needed to make all subject matter understandable (Hill, 1995). Writing about information

studied in other subject matters evolves into active learning in which students process content information while sharpening their writing conventions (Stooksberry, 1996).

Dusterhoff reported that students' ability to write improves through writing in math class. The researcher suggested several ideas that would incorporate and improve writing in students who write in the math content area. First, math provides challenging concepts to write about like how to regroup the addition of two digit numbers. Next, some students were assigned to interview and report about how their family members used math. This assignment not only provided the opportunity for the student to write about math, but it made math more relevant to the student. Finally, repeated exposure to math vocabulary offered the opportunity for the correct usage and spelling of math terminology (1995).

Writing in the curriculum is not only for "core" classes, but also can be used effectively in the arts. Wales Arts & Activities reported using an artist's notebook in class. The notebook offered the student a platform on which to communicate his/ her feelings on the subject of art. Topics ranged from how the students arrived at their ideas for art projects to their opinions of art that they viewed (1998). Wales' artist notebooks allowed the students to use their metacognitive analysis skills. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' Curriculum reported on the topic of metacognitive analysis in 1989. They found that metacognitive analysis decreased anxiety, offered the student the opportunity to think through correct an incorrect processes, and allowed the student to be more involved in the learning process (Quinn, R, & Wilson, M., 1997).

Finally, writing should not be limited to the language arts classroom, but should be incorporated across the curriculum as a tool to make concepts and idea more obtainable to

students and also as a way to encourage higher order thing skill. Not only will students reap the aforementioned benefits, but also the writing provides the teacher with an authentic assessment (Dusterhoff, 1995).

The idea of using portfolios fits neatly into this study with the use of journaling to develop writing skills. LaBoskey's article, Portfolios Here, Portfolios There (2000) took a "look at using the portfolio both as a way of constructing meaning and as an opportunity to teach assessment of one's own work."(p.591) LaBoskey stated, "in children's minds, the idea of best work meant work that represented the people, objects, and events, that were of most interest and importance to them." That is the response expected, to help the students write and invest part of themselves' in what is most important to them. That emotional investment is key to learning which can be accomplished directly as the portfolio is created by teacher and learning (2000). Beyond the feeling of ownership for the student, the teacher now has the time to use the educational portfolios as an assessment tool processing student work over an extended period of time. For this purpose portfolios will enable the researchers to evaluate the students' progress of skills, and allow them to assess the students' emotional investment throughout the nine weeks of the study. At the very least, portfolios can make a profound difference in the lives of the teachers and learners who engage in them (2000).

The use of various teaching techniques such as portfolios, cooperative learning, and media presentations does help to excite the learning, hopefully to the point that the student will take an active part in his/her own learning. However, these styles of teaching also take some time, and in many cases, training, to effectively use in the classroom. King and Newmann wrote in, Will Teacher Learning Advance School Goals? (2000), that to be

effective, professional development should address three dimensions of school capacity, teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; the strength of the school wide professional community; and the coherence of the school program. Individual teacher learning is the foundation of improved classroom practice. Teachers must exercise their individual strengths to advance towards the goals of the school under a unique set of conditions (2000). Even the idea of teacher learning has limits and can't be expected to achieve large gains in student performance. But as teachers learn to use more creative approaches to instruction, the desired effect would be that students assume that teacher enthusiasm and lead to an improved effort and motivation to perform. That enthusiasm must be developed in such a way as to help students learn to respond to more than external motivation. We need to help them move to internal control - to learn to take responsibility for their own academic success (Stiggins,1999). The aim is to expand the vision of the students, supporting them in such a way that they will feel comfortable writing on any subject, even about topics foreign to them. The article Encouraging Students To Write About Weird Things, written by Frank Trocco impressed the researchers and encouraged the to look for innovative, and challenging writing lessons. Trocco supported the idea that not all writing should be technical in nature and assessed in a standardized way (2000). Many students today do not need to be encouraged to study weird topics. It is possible to ride this wave of New-Age enthusiasm and help students' transform their thinking processes into an academically responsible approach to understanding the world (2000). Writing about weird things or unexplored areas of thought is the journey we hope to encourage our students to take. The journey itself is at least as important as the destination. Ultimately, the goal is that the learners will be writing because they have

something of value to say and not solely because they were given another writing assignment to complete.

Encouragement and developing confidence in the students to try is a major hurdle when asking the question, "what do you think?" Most students freeze, worrying that they can get it wrong. One method to help develop trust and confidence in students as they learn was presented by Barbara Wasik in, Volunteer Tutoring Programs (1997). A meta-analysis and peer-tutoring project found positive achievement effects in reading and writing when students worked with a tutor each week (1997). The bonding of teachers, tutors, or peers to learners is an important element in creating a safe non-threatening classroom. Robin Fogarty in her article, The Intelligent Friendly Classroom (1998) produced a list of guidelines to serve as a bridge between theory and practice in the intelligence-friendly classroom:

1. Set a safe emotional climate-a caring place for all learners. In setting a climate for thinking, risk-taking becomes the norm, and learners understand that to learn is to make mistakes as well as to experience successes. (This statement more than any other represents the focus and goals of this study.)
2. Create a rich learning environment. The ideal classroom resembles a children's museum, in which students are repeatedly and implicitly invited to interact with the learning environment.
3. Teach the mind tools and skills of life. These mind and body "tools" range from communication and social skills to skills of thinking and reflecting.
4. Develop the skillfulness of the learner through divers practice lessons, from novice to competent writer.

5. Challenge through the experience of doing. Learning is a function of experience.

6. Target multiple dimensions of intelligence. The educational community embraces Multiple Intelligence theory because it provides a natural framework for inspired practice.

Transfer learning through reflection. The reflective use of learning is the cornerstone of the intelligence-friendly classroom. It drives personal application and transfer of learning. It makes learning personal, purposeful, meaningful, and relevant and gives the brain reason to pay attention, understand, and remember. Reflection is sometimes the missing piece in today's classroom puzzle, as the pacing of the school day often precludes time for reflection. Yet reflection, introspection, and mindfulness must accompany collaborations and discussions because the time for reflection is the time for internalizing the learning (p.657, 1998).

Hickman, Quick, Haynie, and Flakes in, The Value of Reflection across the Curriculum (2000) wrote that middle school students are thinkers. More than that, though, they are curious and often perceptive. These characteristics lend themselves well to the use of reflective writing as a means of enhancing student learning in all subjects. Encouraging students to think and write reflectively helps them to internalize key concepts and to create a true connection between what they learn and what they live. Reasonable educators understand, however that not every lesson will stir student emotions, nor will every activity evoke an impassioned reflection. Reflection is beneficial even if it follows a routine task. The main goals of reflective writing are for students to focus on what they

have done, what they have learned, and how they have changed or are likely to change as a result of this learning (2000).

The intelligence-friendly classroom is no enigma. It makes perfect sense. It draws on the many powers of intelligence of both the teacher and the learner. It is the teaching/learning process in all its glorious colors. It is the science of good, sound pedagogy couples with the art of uniquely creative minds (1998). This concept of creativity brought to the classroom is one of the driving forces behind the researchers' desire to make changes in the way students' approach learning and specifically writing.

Creative ideas are especially needed in the area of student assessment. Because assessment is an essential part of teaching, tools must be developed that not only meets the teacher's needs, but also is fair to the largest number of students. In, Writing To The Rubric (1999), Mabry discussed many facets to the use of rubrics in assessment. Rubrics tend to improve reliability, the likely hood that different raters will award similar scores. Frequently referred to as scoring guidelines, assessment rubrics are rules by which the quality of answers is determined (1998). Rubrics can be modified to assess specific areas of a student's work, which is one reason a writing rubric was designed to use with the pre and posttest.

The final part of teacher improvement is in the area of technology. As stated in Technology in Language Arts Teacher Education current students enrolled in certain colleges in the field of education are now being required to pass basic and advanced technology assessments (1999). Technology is a broad title, which includes software, video, e-mail, and the Internet (Rogier, et al 1999), (Goycochea, et al 1998).

Teachers who are computer literate can take advantage of programs such as a

university -school partnerships. These programs coordinate university students with middle school students via e-mail. The program provide the middle school students the opportunity to start a written dialogue with an university student that would encourage the student to communicate through the written form while taking advantage of technology. The communications between students were then supplemented with revision lesson from their teacher. University students were also taught how to encourage and guide the middle school students in the writing process by questioning students on audience and purpose (Pope 1999).

Teachers are not the only ones who would benefit from technology training. The article by Goycochea et al Rich School Poor School studied two middle schools in the same California school district, each school had very different results on their writing assessments. By studying the demographics, Goycochea et al reported a factor that contributed to the lack of writing achievement for the students enrolled at the "poor school" was the lack of access to computers and modems (1998).

The literature suggests a number if ways that students can improve their writing. The goal of this project is that the students will begin to enjoy writing and actually start to look forward to writing, and expressing their feelings and creativity without an assignment being given. The journey itself is at least as important as the destination. The following project objectives, processes, and action plan were developed by the action researchers of the story.

## Project Objectives and Processes

The objective is to provide students with an opportunity to express thoughts and

ideas freely using the written word. We hope to accomplish this by motivating attitude changes and offering new approaches to the "idea" of writing.

As a result of the writing intervention, during the period of October 2000 to December, 2000, the targeted fourth, seventh, and eighth grade will increase in their writing ability and decrease in their writing apprehension, as measured the researchers made writing rubric and writers' checklist.

In order to accomplish the project objectives, the following processes are necessary. In order to accomplish our project objective we plan on implementing three writing strategies over a 12-week period.

1. Bi-weekly journalizing will provide students with an opportunity to express their thoughts on a wide variety of topics. This will help establish a firm constitution of writing for students to explore their own ideas in a safe and - non-threatening way.

2.Cooperative writing exercises will be implemented throughout the study too provide students with an opportunity to share written ideas and to strive for a common goal. Enhancing students' abilities to brainstorm for ideas, and share thoughts for the common good of the assignment will improve their ability to communicate through writing.

3.Creative writing exercises will provide an opportunity for students to explore their thoughts and opinions, as well as organize them into cohesive ideas. This will allow them to freely express themselves in written language and develop confidence in thought organization.

Project Action Plan

I) WEEK I

Pre writing Journal Rubric
A) Intervention
1) Assessment - Prewriting Activity
2) Story Starter
B) Cooperative Groups
1)Jigsaw
C) Creative Writing picture writing
D) Survey students

II WEEK II
A) Journalize - Use observation .check list.
B) Parent / Staff Survey

III WEEK III
A) Creative writing activity
B) Journalize - use check list
C) English Teacher Interview

IV WEEK IV
A) Journalize - use check list

V WEEK V
A) Journalize - use check list
B) Cooperative learning - group writing

VI WEEK VI
A) Journalize - use check list
B)English teacher interview

VII WEEK VII
A) Journalize-use checklist
B) Story starters

VIII WEEK VIII
A) Journalize-use checklist
B) Peer interview

IX WEEK IX
A) Journalize
B) Journalize-use checklist

X WEEK X
A) Journalize
B) Story starters

XI WEEK XI

Journalize

XII WEEK XII

A) Post writing rubric

## Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, a rubric will be used to measure writing ability. In addition a checklist will be used to measure writing apprehension.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# PROJECT RESULTS

## Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve student's writing skills, increase student's interest in sharing their feelings, and to motivate students to write more. The implementation of cooperative learning, journaling, and creative writing activities were selected to effect the desired changes. A free writing activity started the research project. It was used as an initial assessment tool and the bases for comparison with the final writing activity of the project. The cooperative learning strategies utilized group writing and a peer review process. The cooperative learning was utilized in order to draw students into the writing process by sharing the work with others within the group. This in turn would decrease writers' apprehension. The cooperative groups were randomly picked throughout the intervention. Journaling served several purposes. To monitor writing skill improvement, evaluate the level of interest in writing shown by the students, and to establish a routine of writing for the specific purpose of self-expression. The student's journaling was done once or twice a week for the duration of the study. Creative writing activities were implemented to be fun for the student's and encourage

participation. These activities were selected by the researchers and were used to meet the needs of their specific study group. The various creative activities were introduced weekly. We held close to our original action plan for implementing the tools of the study.

For assessment purposes a checklist was used to monitor student participation and effort during writing tasks. Teacher feedback was given to students in the form of written comments and questions. This reinforced what students had written and worked to prompt additional student comments. Comments were made to encourage the students' higher order thinking skills. Interviews of English Specialists, a general staff survey, and student survey were conducted within the framework of the other interventions. This information gave the study background information as to the extent of the problems with student's writing.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the improvement of student writing skills and evaluate the student's investment in writing, a pre and post-test was administered. There was a slight improvement in the rubric score between the pre and post-test. The results are presented in the table below.

Comparison of Pre and Post-Test Writing Rubric

Site A

| Writing Rubric | Pre-test results | Post-test results |
|---|---|---|
| Average score | 5.5 | 6.2 |

Site B

| Writing Rubric | Pre-test results | Post-test results |
|---|---|---|
| Average score | 4.7 | 6.1 |

The interventions appear to have had a positive effect on the targeted study group. The specific behaviors that were monitored by use of the checklist during journaling improved over the course of the study. For example, it was noted that off-task behavior, disrupting other student's work effort, and not using time wisely all were checked with less frequency as the study progressed. In turn more students worked quietly, spent the allotted time writing and answered the journaling task with more completeness. The greatest marked improvement was found in the student's journal writing. The least marked change was realized in the creative writing activities although these writing experiences were a valuable part of the action plan. It was apparent that these creative activities served as a distraction rather than a constructive focused practice. The student's demonstrated enjoyment while participating in these tasks, but the quality of the students work was generally poor.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the summary of these findings regarding student's writing, there was a slight improvement in writing abilities. It is felt that Site 2 experienced greater level of improvement due to less writing experience than students at Site 1. The routine of journal writing was the biggest influence on student improvement. Students became more focused on the task at hand, and grew into the emotional commitment of expressing their

feelings which raised the quality of the accomplished work . There were also factors that inhibited student performance. Moments when students had little interest in doing a quality job was a random occurrence and very difficult to predict. Another important influence on student performance was the task they were engaged in. Students for the most part did a much better job when the topic was something they had a high level of interested in. This led to a higher frequency of on task behavior and less disruptive behavior. Students had a tendency to write a more creative response when fantasy questions were posed, for example: "If I had a million dollars", "If I were king of the world, I would", or "if I were a famous person I would be." Students were least interested in introspective questions such as; "the saddest time of my life was when", "Sometimes I feel like everyone wants me to", and "I worry about". Which created a high level of off task behavior. It was clear early in the study that the more the student was interested in the topic the better the writing effort. There were outside factors that influenced not only this study, but the leaning environment in general. There are physiological, social, and emotional aspects of daily living that effect a student's ability to learn. It is easy to identify a student who is not feeling well or one that is emotionally upset. These factors are difficult to over come, but there are ways to review the benefits of a healthy lifestyle within the framework of a lesson plan. If this study was to be duplicated the researcher should take additional time in preparing the subjects to give their best effort. Encouraging students to do their best may be just as important the physical act of writing. The researcher must also be willing to put in the extra effort to read and make comments regarding each student's journal entry as discussed in the project summary. Using a variety of assessment techniques such as journal entry feedback, peer

evaluation and instructor based modeling students were encouraged to think on a deeper level.

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# Appendices

# GENERAL STUDENT SURVEY

On school nights do you get eight to nine hours of sleep?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you have breakfast three or more mornings a week?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you eat foods from the five basic food groups everyday?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you eat dinner at home with your family?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you have a way that helps you relax when you are tense or upset; a way to manage stress?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you exercise, are physically active, three to five times a week for 20 minutes or longer?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you drink three or more sugared drinks a day? (Pop or Kool-Aid.....)
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

While at school do you feel safe?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you take pride in completing your own schoolwork?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Generally do you feel good about who you are and your character?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

# General Student Survey

Do you regularly set goals for personal improvement?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do the decisions you make at school affect your achievement and personal growth in a negative way?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Other students in class disrupt / interfere with my learning?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

My teacher helps me.
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

My teacher is fair.
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you read the newspaper? Yes or No

Do you watch two or more hours of TV a day? Yes or No

Do you spend at least one hour a week on your favorite hobby? Yes or No

Do you spend 45 minutes or more reading daily? ( include school and practice work) Yes or No

# General Student Survey

On school nights do you get eight to nine hours of sleep?
Never Rarely ½ the time (Almost always) Always

Do you have breakfast three or more mornings a week?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always (Always)

Do you eat from the five basic food groups everyday?
Never Rarely (½ the time) Almost always Always

Do you eat dinner at home with your family?
Never Rarely ½ the time (Almost always) Always

Do you have a way that helps you relax when you are tense or upset?
Never Rarely (½ the time) Almost always Always

Do you exercise, get physically active, three or more times a week for 20 minutes or longer?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always (Always)

Do you drink three or more sugared drinks a day? (Pop or Kool-Aid.....)
Never Rarely ½ the time (Almost always) Always

While at school do you feel safe?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always (Always)

Do you take pride in completing your own schoolwork?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always (Always)

Generally do you feel good about who you are and your character?
Never Rarely ½ the time (Almost always) Always

# General Student Survey

Do you regularly set goals for personal improvement?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do the decisions you make at school affect your achievement and personal growth in a negative way?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Other students in class disturb my learning?
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

My teacher helps me.
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

My teacher is fair.
Never Rarely ½ the time Almost always Always

Do you read the newspaper? Yes or No

Do you watch two or more hours of TV a day? Yes or No

Do you spend at least one hour a week on your favorite hobby?
Yes or No

Do you spend 45 minutes or more reading daily? Yes or No

Students name

# WRITING RUBRIC

TEACHER EVALUATION DATE _____

| CRITERIA | 1 Meets Some Requirements | 2 Meets All Requirements | 3 Exceeds Requirements | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Completeness and Timeliness | some writing done, incomplete or turned in late | all writing completed turned in on time | all entries completed and addressed task | |
| Organization and content | doesn't make sense, confusing | makes some sense, topic addressed, complete thoughts | excellent, well thought out, clear | |
| Communicates thoughts | incomplete thoughts little effort given | good effort made, complete thoughts related to topic | strong personal investment in writing, several thoughts related to topic | |

No writing entry, no score SCORE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# WRITING RUBRIC

TEACHER EVALUATION DATE _____

| CRITERIA | 1 Meets Some Requirements | 2 Meets All Requirements | 3 Exceeds Requirements | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Completeness and Timeliness | some writing done, incomplete or turned in late | all writing completed turned in on time | all entries completed and addressed task | 3 |
| Organization and content | doesn't make sense, confusing | makes some sense, topic addressed, complete thoughts | excellent, well thought out, clear | 3 |
| Communicates thoughts | incomplete thoughts little effort given | good effort made, complete thoughts related to topic | strong personal investment in writing, several thoughts related to topic | 2 |

No writing entry, no score SCORE 8

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

My Perfect Day
by:



I would be having a perfect day if I woke up at 9:00 looking at the glorious sites out the window of my $19 billion mansion in Florida. I would go down the glass stairs and have a breakfast of vanilla ice cream. I would then call my friends Asley, Ashley, Lindsey, Amanda, Angela and Steph (Rachael) and we would travel to the center of the earth and return just in time to eat dinner and then they would spend the night.

3
3
2
8



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

I would wake up at 9:00 and

My perfect day would be the day me, my family have to meet in the kitch at 11:00 for breakfast/lunch and eat the food my dad picked up from Luigi. Later when we are done eating we would go get my 3 best friends Angela, Gnette, and [redacted] Brittny, we would drive to the beach and swim, after that we would go to the park and have a picnic will the kids are playing my mom and dad would get would get the picnic stuff ready (which would be like a snack time, when we are finished we will go horse backriding and go down a long path and the last thing I would do is go to the Bulls game and the Bulls would win by 6 90 Hornets. That would be my perfect day.

3
3
3

9

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# *JOURNAL CHECKLIST*

Teacher :_____ Class:_____ Date:_____

Behaviors being observed during journal activity

a. kept eyes on own paper/quiet
b. spent allotted time writing
c. spent only a portion of allotted time writing
d. time off task/talking, looking at other's work
e. answered journal task

| STUDENT ROLE | BEHAVIORS TO BE OBSERVED | | | | | COMMENTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | a. | b. | c. | d. | e. | |
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# JOURNAL CHECKLIST

Teacher : CAWLER Class: Health Date: _____

## Behaviors being observed during journal activity

a. kept eyes on own paper/quiet
b. spent allotted time writing
c. spent only a portion of allotted time writing
d. time off task/talking, looking at other's work
e. answered journal task

| STUDENT ROLE | BEHAVIORS TO BE OBSERVED | | | | | COMMENTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | a. | b. | c. | d. | e. | |
| M | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| A. | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | very talkative |
| R. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | wanted to read aloud |
| A. | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| M. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| R. | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| D. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| A | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| T | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | Never saw her face Thao worked so hard |
| E | | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| J | | | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| I. | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | up out of her seat |
| B. | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | |
| | | | | | | |
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BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Health

1. he dressed up like Michael Jackson
2. he told kids to go for their goals
3. he said to be the best you can be

1. how do you do the moon walk
2. how do you go for your goals when your only in 8th grade

1. GO FOR YOUR GOALS

learning a new skill takes patience & practice.

Learning a new skill takes patience & practice.

~~learning a new skill takes~~



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. If you go to sleep thing positive thoughts you will wake up feeling better.
2. You should do what makes you feel good and not do what everyone else wants you to do.
3. If you think of good things you will look it and if you think of depressing things you will look depressed.
1. What was the point of the Michael Jackson thing?
2. Why did he talk so much about sports?
3. You should never give up keep trying to make your dreams come true, and don't do what everyone else wants you to do.

Learning a new skill takes patience and practice.

Learning a new skill takes patience and practice.



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# If I were a millionaire I would...



If I were a millionaire I would go to "Toys"R"US" and go on a $$. Joe spending spree. Then I would buy a dog, a dalmation with training and a lot of doggy toys. After that I would buff a house with a gazeebo, a pool, a hot tub, and a personal dance club under it. (just mine)(down by the river) With the money left I would buy furniture (including a pool table). like a couch and a chair of two. And that is what I would do with a millio dollars

Chris your doing some cool things with your millieon - did you give any thought to who you would enjoy doing all this with?

Chris [redacted]

Students name [redacted]

# WRITING RUBRIC

TEACHER EVALUATION DATE _____

| CRITERIA | 1 Meets Some Requirements | 2 Meets All Requirements | 3 Exceeds Requirements | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Completeness and Timeliness | some writing done, incomplete or turned in late | all writing completed turned in on time | all entries completed and addressed task | 2 |
| Organization and content | doesn't make sense, confusing | makes some sense, topic addressed, complete thoughts | excellent, well thought out, clear | 2 |
| Communicates thoughts | incomplete thoughts little effort given | good effort made, complete thoughts related to topic | strong personal investment in writing, several thoughts related to topic | 1 |

No writing entry, no score SCORE 5

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# My Perfect Day

I would sleep till noon. I would have two waffles with chocolate chips and chocolate syrp. Then I would relax and play my gameboy and watch t.v. Then I would go outside, sit under my tree and think. Then I would have a peanut-butter and jelly sandwich and a glass of chocolate milk for lunch. Then I would take a walk in the bike path. Then I would have all my favorite foods for dinner. Then I would go buy all the stuff I want. Then I would go to bed.

2
2
1
5

BEST COPY AVAILABLE